A New Dawn for Women’s Sports in North America

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Professional Women’s Sports Organizations in North America have long been plagued by a number of issues. Public reception of these organizations has often been negative, and the landscape of professional sports entertainment has frequently excluded them. However, fresh beginnings are on the horizon as a number of new leagues debuted this month, including the Professional Women’s Hockey League (PWHL), which has boldly situated itself on the hockey scene in 6 cities across North America. What has the PWHL done so far? Put their fanbase on full display, and demonstrate their place in sports entertainment.

Professional women’s hockey in North America has a complicated history, spanning many shifts in organization. As of last season, there were two individual leagues running concurrently. It was agreed upon that eventually a unified league would be necessary to host the greatest level of competition while ensuring successful marketing. In June 2023, it was announced that the individual leagues would join to form the unified Professional Women’s Hockey League, or PWHL. Teams, venues, and jerseys were quickly announced, with the “original six” set to play in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Minnesota, New York, and Boston. The PWHL’s inaugural season opened on New Year’s Day in front of an excited crowd at the Mattamy Athletic Centre, where New York took down the home Toronto team 4-0 in a 24 save shutout by goalie Kristen Campbell. 2,537 people were in attendance at the sold out arena, with an average audience of 879,000, and a total of 2.9 million viewers across CBC, Sportsnet and TSN. In-person attendance records continued to be shattered night after night, hitting a record high of 13,316 fans at Minnesota’s home opener against Boston. And a staple of every game? Fans, old and young, incredibly enthusiastic about not only the opportunity for women to play in a professional league, but the ability to cheer them on. Some have created posters that have gone viral on the internet with encouraging and inspiring messages such as “You fought for my dream” and “Play for the girls who dressed in storage rooms.” Most recently, a game between Toronto and Montreal dubbed the “Battle on Bay Street '' hosted by Scotiabank Arena, sold out all of its 18,800 seats within *minutes* of a pre-sale for PWHL-Toronto ticket holders. This February 16 showdown between these two cities steeped in classic rivalry is set to be the highest-attended professional women’s hockey game ever. Clearly, women’s hockey has fans.

There is much more light and growth on the horizon for the PWHL, but for now, let’s cherish this new beginning and tune into a game! All games are free to stream on Youtube.